



Jacobs Center Seminar Series

Prof. Dr. Christine Lötscher

ISEK – Popular Culture Studies UZH
Children's and YA Media



Teen Angst and eco-passions. Negotiating mental health on TV in times of Climate Crisis

Our climate is suffering, plants and animals are suffering, children and young people are suffering, while older generations continue to benefit, even in the face of the multiple crises of the present: This accusation, pointed out by Greta Thunberg and other climate activists, has become a widespread narrative in recent years and has also shaped popular literature and media. Particularly taken up in TV series for young people on popular streaming platforms like Netflix, Sky, Amazon Prime or Disney+, they put mental health issues on the agenda. It is safe to say that there is no series for young adults without psychotherapy sessions or scenes in psychiatric hospitals. Anxiety, gender dysphoria, eating disorders are staged not only as individual psychological problems, but – often with a touch of cynicism – as ‘healthy’ reactions to a ‘sick’ world. Rue, for example, the

protagonist in Sam Levinson’s infamous HBO-drama *Euphoria* (2019–), is born during 9/11 and suffers trauma. She is diagnosed with a multitude of disorders at the age of four and continues fighting anxiety and addiction throughout her college years. At the same time, teenagers are staged as the ones who, while suffering, are ready to fight for a better world. In fictional narratives, young characters paradoxically appear as passive sufferers and as activists at the same time. Passions appear in a double sense: suffering from the world and passion for the world merge into a figuration that can take on different forms. By representing mental health issues as a form of resistance, by entertaining their audience, TV-dramas for young adults often shock – and thereby touch on complex ethical questions.

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